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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001513

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [BA](#) [REGION](#) [POL](#)
SUBJECT: BAHRAINIS REACT WITH JOY AND RELIEF TO END OF
HOSTILITIES IN LEBANON

REF: A. MANAMA 1473
[1](#)B. MANAMA 1458
[1](#)C. MANAMA 1414
[1](#)D. MANAMA 1391
[1](#)E. MANAMA 1339 (NOTAL)

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Bahrainis have greeted the implementation of a cessation of violence in Lebanon with joy and relief - joy at what many view as Hizballah's "historic victory" and relief that they are no longer viewing daily images of Lebanese civilian casualties and destruction. The Cabinet August 13 released a statement hailing Lebanon's "heroic solidarity and solid resistance." The statement also welcomes UN Security Council resolution 1701. The press continues to cover the activities of a delegation representing seven political societies on its visit to Damascus and Beirut, where the members met with Hizballah MPs and other Lebanese politicians. Shia contacts have told us that the United States undermined its interests in the Arab world by supporting Israel and not taking serious action to implement an early ceasefire. Press commentary remains vitriolic, saying the U.S. is trying to create a new Middle East through death and destruction in Arab countries. The cessation of hostilities greatly relieves pressure that had been building in Bahrain, likely prompting the political class to return its focus to domestic issues in the run-up to the fall parliamentary and municipal elections. End Summary.

Mixture of Joy and Relief

[1](#)2. (C) Many Bahrainis have reacted with joy and relief to implementation of a cessation of hostilities in Lebanon - joy at what is perceived to be Hizballah's "historic victory" and relief that the violence has ended and graphic images of Lebanese civilian casualties and destruction have stopped. The Cabinet August 13 issued a statement "greeting the Lebanese people for their heroic solidarity and solid resistance to Israel's brutal offensive on civilians and infrastructure." The Cabinet also "values the tremendous efforts exerted by the Lebanese government and the UN Security Council in reaching resolution 1701, which called for a halt of military operations, considering it to be a positive political step toward ending the cycle of violence in Lebanon that claimed huge losses in human lives and material damage."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Following Hizballah Secretary General Nasrallah's

public pronouncement of victory the evening of August 14, people took to the streets to celebrate, the press reports. There were car parades in the heavily Shia areas of Manama, Sitra, and northern villages in the vicinity of Saar and Budaiya. A Bahrain On-Line chatroom participant posted an item saying that residents of the village of Jid Ali distributed candy and sweets until plain-clothes police told them to stop. Rarely seen before the conflict, Hizballah flags are now a common sight. Participants in demonstrations and marches carry them, as do volunteers soliciting donations for Lebanon. Hizballah stickers on car windows have begun to appear.

Delegation Meets with Lebanese Politicians

¶4. (U) The press is closely following the activities of a delegation representing seven local political societies to Syrian and Lebanon. After meeting with Lebanese refugees and relief groups in Damascus for several days, the delegation traveled to Beirut early Monday morning and met with Hizballah members of the Lebanese parliament and former PM Salim Al Hoss, and will see parliamentary chairman Nabih Berri Tuesday. In a front-page news item, delegation member (and leading Shia opposition society Al Wifaq foreign relations director) Saeed Al Majed said the group was in a meeting with Hizballah deputies when Israeli jets bombed neighboring buildings in south Beirut just before the ceasefire took effect August 14.

¶5. (C) Bahraini Shia contacts have told us that their community is united in its anger at the situation in Lebanon and frustrated that the U.S. did not do more to achieve an early ceasefire. They believe that the U.S. response

undermined many of our interests and policy objectives in the region. Nizar Al Baharna, vice president of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry and a leader of Al Wifaq, told Pol/Econ Chief that the United States acted as "judge and jury" by supporting Israel and postponing serious moves to reach an early ceasefire. Any attempts to revive the peace process will fail because "people will only remember Israel's aggression."

Ceasefire Prompts "Sigh of Relief"

¶6. (C) Nizar Al Qari, member of Al Wifaq's Consultative (Shura) Council and a self-identified member of the society's liberal wing, told P/E Chief that he breathed "a sigh of relief" at word of the UN Security Council resolution. He said the Al Wifaq leadership had taken a policy decision to keep a lid on demonstrations. People were encouraged to express themselves through marches, demonstrations, and other events such as poetry readings, but were instructed not to engage in any confrontations or violence.

¶7. (C) The closest call, Al Qari said, was the July 12 march in the vicinity of the U.S. Embassy (Ref E). Al Wifaq deployed some representatives to the demonstration to urge participants to disperse. In the event, there were only a few isolated clashes between police and protesters. Al Qari said that in the past, Al Wifaq would take to the streets, sometimes fighting with police, in reaction to events in the region. Now the organization is firmly committed to pro-actively promoting its domestic agenda. Al Wifaq, he stated, is independent of Iran, Hizballah, and Sistani, and refuses to be led by external events and actors. Al Qari said that he personally views Hizballah and Nasrallah as extremists.

Map of the "New Middle East"

¶8. (U) Press commentary remains strongly anti-Israel and U.S., with a continued refrain of the United States trying to create a new Middle East through death and destruction in the Arab world. Al Wasat editor-in-chief Mansour Al Jamri complained August 15 about the "new Middle East," saying "to us in the Arab world and the region, the word 'new' means chaos and disorder... All disasters come with this secret word. The U.S. Administration gave legitimacy to the Israeli aggression on Lebanon to destroy an entire country, protect the aggressor, and begin the birth of a new Middle East." While many commentators welcome UNSCR 1701, Akhbar Al Khaleej columnist Fawziya Rasheed argued August 15 that the resolution is unfair to the "Lebanese resistance and its weapons that protected Lebanon and the Arab nation" from Israel.

¶9. (U) Akhbar Al Khaleej writer Mahmeed Al Mahmeed published an open letter to the Ambassador August 15 asking for an explanation of the map of the new Middle East which, among many other border changes, does not show Bahrain as an independent sovereign country. This map, printed next to a current geopolitical map of the region, shows such "countries" as Greater Lebanon, Greater Jordan, Islamic Sacred State, Arab Shia State, Free Kurdistan, and Free Baluchistan. Al Mahmeed asked, "Is this plan true? Is this map accurate and real? Is this map made by the American government or by an unofficial institution or group?" (Note: An Internet search reveals the source of the map to be Army LTC (Ret) and author/pundit Ralph Peters, whose recent book "Never Quit the Fight" advocates redrawing Middle Eastern borders to better reflect demographic realities on the ground in the region.)

Comment

¶10. (C) Whatever the longer term consequences of what we view to be Bahrainis' misplaced "victory" celebrations, the implementation of the cessation of hostilities has relieved a tremendous amount of pressure that had been building in Bahrain. The pain that both Sunni and Shia Bahrainis felt seeing daily images of Lebanese civilian casualties and destruction is over for now. Although Bahrainis are holding their breath that the ceasefire holds, many are anxious to turn back to domestic politics. Director of the Bahrain Transparency Society Jasim Al Ajmi told APAO that politicians are gearing up for the fall parliamentary and municipal elections. Lebanon is unlikely to be an issue in the elections, in his view. Rather, the campaign season will likely witness the return of local concerns such as education and unemployment back to center stage.

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